



## City of Seattle

### Firearms

#### Introduction

The United States has a high rate of domestic violence, including many murders that are committed with guns. About two-thirds of the intimate partner homicides in the U.S. are committed using guns. Seattle and Washington State are no exception. From 1997 to August of 2002, there was a total of 308 domestic violence homicides in Washington, 84 of them in King County. This includes homicides of domestic violence victims, their children, friends and family, police officers, self-defense homicides in which perpetrators were killed, and perpetrator suicides. Domestic violence perpetrators killed 59 percent of these homicide victims with a handgun or rifle. At least 12 of these homicides were committed by perpetrators using firearms they were federally prohibited from possessing because they had a prior domestic violence conviction.

The partners in the Seattle-King County criminal justice community are working together to remove guns from domestic violence perpetrators. Specifically, they are developing a comprehensive approach that would prohibit anyone subject to a restraining order or convicted of domestic violence from acquiring or possessing a firearm. The intent is to have the prohibitions quickly and effectively enforced, and violators prosecuted to the full extent of the law. In addition, police would be required to remove firearms from the scenes of domestic violence calls, as the law allows, protecting the victim and the community. To facilitate this process, the City wants to work with its partners to explore new state legislation that would empower local law enforcement and prosecutors to confiscate weapons. This legislation will complement current federal laws and fill noted loopholes that have prevented effective enforcement at the federal, state and local level.

Local work in firearm confiscation began in 1995 when the Criminal Justice Committee (CJC) of the City of Seattle Domestic Violence Prevention Council elected to examine the role of firearms in domestic violence. A Firearms Subcommittee of the CJC began preliminary research on the issue. They could find no law enforcement agencies actively pursuing this area of law enforcement and subsequently recommended that the Council focus on this critical issue.

In 2002, the City of Seattle's Domestic & Sexual Violence Prevention Office (DSVPO) secured funding to work with the Seattle Municipal Court, Seattle Police Department, and City Attorney's Office to research national best practices on firearm confiscation and make recommendations. In 2003, DSVPO secured additional federal funding to help the King County Sheriff's Office initiate a domestic violence firearms project. Under this project, a database for tracking firearm information, from the incident report supplemental form to the orders for surrender, was developed. Further, under strong judicial leadership from a specialized King County domestic violence court, orders for misdemeanor perpetrators to turn in their firearms within 24 hours of sentencing and return to court within 48 hours with proof of surrender from the King County Sheriff ramped up activity on firearm surrender, getting the attention of law enforcement and policymakers. This work on firearms in King County is one of the first efforts in the nation to address the issue, and is serving as a model for efforts by our Seattle criminal justice partners.

The 2003 assessment report, "Removing Firearms from Domestic Violence Perpetrators," identified areas within the Seattle criminal justice system needing improvement or strengthening:

- Policies within law enforcement, prosecution or judiciary that support the removal of guns from perpetrators
- Removal of firearms by police officers at a domestic violence scene
- Documentation in police reports of the presence of guns
- Removal of firearms from arrested perpetrators prior to conviction
- Enforcing of provisions in protection orders prohibiting the purchasing or possession of firearms



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- Procedures for surrendering firearms

### Recent developments

Following the release of the 2003 assessment report, the issue of firearms is being addressed through the efforts of an interagency committee consisting of representatives of the Seattle Police Department, City Law Department, the Seattle Municipal Court, the King County Sheriff's Office and the Domestic & Sexual Violence Prevention Office. Accomplishments to date include:

- Issuing of directives to personal recognizance screeners and probation counselors regarding firearms and domestic violence offenders,
- Drafting of court orders assuring removal of firearms from domestic violence offenders.
- Entering of codes in the Municipal Court Information System that allow for tracking the status of firearm surrender, seizure and forfeiture.
- Designing training on firearms surrender, seizure and forfeiture
- Developed new DV supplemental forms for the Seattle Police Department to assure that relevant firearm fields are completed

The strategic plan that follows builds on the work that has been initiated by the firearm confiscation projects in Seattle and King County, as well as the combined efforts of the Seattle Police Department, the City Attorney's Office, the City Municipal Court, and the Domestic & Sexual Violence Prevention Office.

**Cross Reference of Other Strategic Issues:** Prosecution Plan regarding high risk offenders and Investigations.